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ABSTRACT

Educational planners know that international leadership in the 21st century will require a workforce that is: (1) skilled in science and technology; (2) able to provide better products and services; and (3) trained to solve problems by creative, innovative, and critical thinking. School reform is needed to enhance the potential leadership for this economic growth and to equalize the quality of education for all citizens. This paper traces school reform efforts in the United States, England, and Wales since the 1960s and highlights selected books, laws, reports, and programs that relate to reforms in economics education or educational equity. The document suggests that educational organizations are striving for improvements and that voters decide the speed and quality of the changes by whom they elect and how strongly they demand reform action. References are included. (JHP)

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BEHIND SCHOOL REFORM, USA-ENGLAND: ECONOMICS AND EQUITY

by

Franklin Parker

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Behind School Reform, USA-England: Economics and Equity

By Franklin Parker

Behind education reform in the l980s is a compelling economic motive: England's 20-year trade decline and loss of jobs; the USA's more recent trade deficits, loss of jobs in steel and other industries, and shift from lender to debtor nation. (1) Planners know that international leadership in the 21st century requires a better educated workforce: peopie skilled in science and technology; able to provide better products and services; and able to solve problems by creative, innovative, and critical thinking.

Besides school reform for economic growth, there is an unresolved sociopolitical question about educating the "have-nots." Should schools continue to favor the privileged middle and upper classes? Or should schools elevate, educationally, minorities and the poor into the mainstream, ultimately adding them as workers and taxpayers to the national wealth, rather than their burdening the country in welfare and prison costs? Better schools for economic growth, we have accepted, but not equity. Still unresolved is the question: can we be equal and excellent, too?

The l960s was a decade of egalitarian sociopolitical experimentation. The l980s is a decade of reaction against those experiments. Since l979 England has elected the Conservative Party three times under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who is dedicated to undoing l960s

sociopolitical experiments, such as the Labor Party-sponsored comprehensive schools which educate together bright, average, below average, minorities, and the poor. Ronald Reagan was elected president twice (1980, 1984), partly in reaction to the expansive 1960s Great Society programs, student protest excesses, and the neoprogressive open education movement.

Thatcher and Reagan have tried to reverse over 40 years of their respective national government's involvement and spending on social programs. Present conservative thinking blames costly sociopolitical experiments since and before the 1960s for many of today's social and economic ills. Unsettling rapid change and alleged national giveaway programs to minorities and the poor have frightened the privileged few about sharing their advantages with the many.

Thatcher and Reagan have tried to restore the status quo of quality education for selected elite middle and upper class students. They have cut funds for experimental and minority programs and have favored in their rhetoric elitist, private, and religious education.

One definition of education reform is the effort of special interest groups to redirect education so as to overcome a previous undesireable trend and to move education in a more desired direction that benefits those special groups. With that definition, we can examine 1980s education reform directions.

At a White House ceremony on April 26, 1988, to mark the fifth anniversary of A Nation at Risk (1983), Education Secretary William J. Bennett evaluated school reform in his report, American Education: Making It Work. (2) He listed some school improvements since 1986: a 16-point increase in average Scholastic Aptitude scores, a rise from 76% to 86% of high school seniors passing American history courses, and more homework done in 25% of U.S. high schools. He said:

> Education is getting a little better, but it is nowhere near what it should be....Our students know too little and their command of essential skills is too slight....We are not doing well enough fast enough. We are still at risk. Our students are still being outperformed by their foreign counterparts. There is little evidence that the 250 federal programs since 1965 to aid at risk students have done any good. (3)

National Education Association (NEA) President Mary Futrell called Bennett's report a "coverup for the Reagan Administration's failure to help improve America's schools." Federal aid to elementary and secondary education, she said, fell one third, from 9.2% in 1981 to 6.2% in 1988. Only 5 million of the 14 million children eligible for federal Chapter One remedial aid are being served. She pointed out that former Education Secretary Terrel H. Bell, originator of A Nation at Risk, which spearheaded school reform, was excluded from fifth anniversary White House ceremonies because Bell said "what the White House doesn't want to hear: excellence costs." (Bell had called for new federal aid to education of Marshall Plan magnitude.) (4) Speaking to teachers who rallied in Lafayette Park to protest the White House ceremony, Senator Lowell P. Weicker (R-Conn.), who opposed Reagan's education cuts, called Bennett "the secretary," not of education but "of ignorance." (5)

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Albert Shanker called Bennett's view of education a misguided, old fashioned return to the "golden" 1930s when many teachers were excellent, the family was intact, and drugs and TV did not distract. Shanker said schooling for all did not work then (only 20% graduated from high school) and does not work now in more favorable times, except with the help of better teachers and more money--which Bennett disdains. Shanker ended his letter to Bennett with, "Instead of leading your troops, you keep shooting at them." (6)

Shanker, who deplores "top down" school reform, offered his own reform plan in April: innovative schools-within-existing school buildings taught by concerned teachers, to a normal range of students whose parents approve, and under a principal who supports financially and will not interfere with alternative approaches. A few such "bottom up" alternative schools-within-schools, Shanker said, are succeeding and have been recommended for New York State public schools.

NEA President Futrell's reform plan in March 1988 urged that each state designate one school district as an "experimental, living laboratory to fundamentally restructure America's schools." Bennett responded: "It's rather ironic to hear a call for reform from that organization that has done the most to resist [reform]....But if they are serious, it will be a welcome and refreshing change...."

How do teachers feel about school reform? "Dispirited," answered a May 1988 Carnegie report. Half of the 13,500 teachers surveyed graded school reform C, 29% B, and 20% D or F. Carnegie Foundation President Ernest L. Boyer said that five years of school reform have left teachers "more responsible, but less empowered....The challenge now," is to "make teachers full participants in the process." (7)

About half the states now have school accountability programs, such as: setting student performance goals, linking student performance to funding, publicly comparing districts' test results, providing extra assistance, imposing sanctions, and, when necessary, taking over "academically bankrupt" school districts. (8)

Jersey City public schools, declared academically bankrupt, are being taken over by the state. A May 24, 1988, report documented widespread political patronage, corruption, and mismanagement in Jersey City's 36 public schools, with 29,000 students, mostly disadvantaged (44% Black, 33% Hispanic, 14% white, 9% Asian), and with 60% in remedial programs.

Absenteeism (20%-25%), dropouts (over 50%), and High School Proficiency Test failures (74% of ninth graders) are high. Hearings in 1988 considered replacing both the school district's top administrators and the school board. Kentucky, Texas, and New Mexico are also considering intervening in academically bankrupt school districts. (9)

States have historically delegated their educational responsibility to local school boards. A shift began in the 1960s after legal challenges to using local property tax to finance local public schools. State percentage of local school budgets rose from 39% in 1966 to 50% in 1988. School reform pressures of the 1980s made states exert more direct control over curriculum, high school graduation requirements, standardized testing, and other matters. Some state control advocates believe we can no longer leave curriculum and other decisions to local whims. Opponents of state control fear bureaucratic rigidity, paperwork, and insensitivity to children's needs. Paradoxically, growing state control runs counter to the belief that to get and keep good teachers, they must be given more autonomy. (10)

Illinois is considering using "parent power" to reform Chicago public schools, called the "worst" in the nation. Chicago's 594 public schools with 420,000 students are 60% Black, 24% Hispanic, 12% white, 2% Asian, and 2% other; 37,000 students have limited English proficiency; 69% live below the poverty line; 45% drop out; and 40% of high school students fail two or more courses a year. The teachers' union is strike-prone. The bureaucracy has 42,167 employees, almost half of whom are not teachers. The 1988 budget was $1.9 billion (up from $719 million in 1971, when there were 27% more students), costing $4,373 per pupil, above the national average. (11)

The Chicago Tribune in June charged school administrators with "institutionalized child neglect" and recommended vouchers to let parents

send their children to private schools. The over 16,000 students in Chicago's Roman Catholic schools, administered by a central staff of 32, score above average on standardized tests. Defensive public school administrators say that parochial schools have supportive parents and can reject problem students. (12)

The Illinois law, passed on July 2, 1988, would shift power to parents, who will dominate 594 local school councils, one for each public school, replacing Chicago's single board of education. Each council will include the principal, 6 parents, 2 local residents without children in school, and 2 teachers. Councils will hire principals and set school budgets. Principals, with 3-year renewable contracts, will hire and fire teachers and other school staff (none with tenure). The governor has reservations and may veto or amend the bill, which observers compare to the 1969 decentralization of New York City schools. (13)

Chicago illustrates a "parent power" reform attempt to overcome city slum school problems. Slum schools showed up badly in a March 15, 1988, Carnegie report which stated that people "have written off city schools as little more than human storehouses to keep young people off the streets." (14) There were also critical 1988 reports on geographic illiteracy (American 14-24 year-olds scored sixth in a nine-country survey), and on deficiencies in science and history. (15) U.S. education reform seems spotty, uncertain, contradictory, and often unsuccessful.

British Prime Minister Thatcher's third term election victory on June 11, 1987, assured Parliament's passage on July 29, 1988, of the most far-reaching Education Reform Bill since the 1944 Education Act. (16) It provided for:

1. a national elementary and secondary school core curriculum of 10 subjects: English and math, 10% of teaching time; science, 10%-20%; technology, history, geography, modern foreign language, art, music, and

drama, 10% each; physical education, 5%; with the remaining time for non-compulsory electives, such as the classics;
2. mandatory national assessment at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16 to monitor student progress;
3. opportunity for secondary and larger elementary schools, by vote of parents and principals, to opt out of local control and, as Grant Maintained Schools, to be funded by the national Department of Education and Science;
4. open enrollment, permitting schools to accept pupils outside the neighborhood as space and staff permit, resulting in better schools admitting more and brighter students, thus getting more funding, and forcing poorer schools to improve or close;
5. tighter financial control of Britain's 47 universities, and no tenure for new faculty (those appointed before November 1987 retain tenure);
6. 29 polytechnical colleges and 346 other colleges transferred from local to national control and finance; and
7. new City Technology Colleges (secondary school level, ages 11-18), linked to industry and international trade needs. (17)

Opponents say the bill gives more power to heads of school over their largely Labor Party-oriented unionized teachers; that the controversial "opting out" by mainly parental vote from local authority to national Department of Education and Science control and funding is a deliberate move to destroy Labor Party-oriented local government, consolidate Conservative Party power, weaken comprehensive schools that grew out of the democratizing 1944 Education Act, and so restore elite grammar schools for the privileged. Opponents say that wealthy parents will be able to remove schools from local control and operate them like privileged private schools, that national tests might lead the government to funnel low scoring children into nonacademic programs, and that free choice of schools will benefit the affluent at the expense of the poor and minorities (if the best school is 10 or more miles away, only the well-off can afford the daily transportation costs). (18)

Conservatives compare Thatcher's opting out plan with the Reagan administration's voucher plan, both emphasizing parental choice and

tending to group middle class students away from poorer ethnic students whose schools, as their enrollments drop, may have to close. Opponents call the Thatcher school reform bill "damaging, dangerous and divisive" in emasculating local government, in leaving little room for curriculum diversity, and in bringing back selective grammar schools in place of comprehensive schools. (19)

Opponents charge that since 1979 the Conservative Party has cut state school funds from 14.3% to 12.7% of public expenditures (1981); provided nursery schools for fewer than one-fourth of 3 and 4-year-olds; closed 1,575 primary schools and 312 secondary schools; removed 36,000 teaching jobs; reduced university entrants by 6,000 per year after 1980; and cut the value of student grants. (20)

Opponents see the proposed 29 secondary City Technology Colleges in urban areas (to be started by industry with government paying operating costs) as another move to replace local education authority-operated further education (for those over age 16) with central government-controlled and financed technical schools. Conservatives also want closer university-industry ties to serve Britain's economic needs. University opponents call the bill a "recipe for disaster," charging that the cost-conscious Thatcher government has put universities under siege: low salaries, shrinking research facilities, and cuts in recent years that have driven thousands of academics to industry or overseas jobs. (21)

Those favoring the education reform bill say it will make for a more coherent and effective school system. Many people, they say, were disillusioned with 1960s-70s progressive and egalitarian attempts, such as comprehensive schools for all in place of state and private grammar schools for high achievers. Charging lowered standards, they cite one study which found the average 14-year-old Briton a year behind the German 14-year-old

in math, while the bottom 40% were two years behind. School inspectors recently graded 25% of England's secondary schools unsatisfactory. (22)

Conservatives say that school reform is overdue; that school costs have risen sharply despite falling enrollments; that efficiency requires a national core curriculum, national pupil assessment, and teacher accountability; that "opting out" gives parents more freedom of choice; that if poor quality schools attract fewer pupils, they should improve or close; that higher education cannot reform itself and needs government's firm hand; that tenure denial and pensioning off of old faculty removes academic dead wood; that new City Technology Colleges linked to industry will improve Britain's international trade position and increase science graduates by 35% and engineers by 25% more than in 1980. (23)

Economist editor Frances Cairncross says historians do blame Britain's industrial decline on poor state education and that while the brightest 10% of English students do as well as the best in Germany and Japan, some 70% leave school at the legal leaving age of 16.
Fewer than 20% of early school leavers get further systematic training. Those who continue academic education after age 16 specialize too narrowly in 2 or 3 subjects, compared to more broadly prepared German, French, and Japanese students. (24)

Cairncross noted that the 1944 Education Act envisioned grammar schools for the academically able, secondary modern schools for the less able, and technical schools for the manually inclined. The technical schools never worked out. For decades the age 11+ exam separated children into grammar schools for the bright and secondary modern for the rest, most of whom left school as soon as they legally could. In 1967 only 22% stayed even one year past the legal leaving age (then 15). (25)

Wanting to end this unfair division and having the American public schools in mind, the Labor Party in power in the mid 1960s gradually

replaced grammar schools and secondary modern schools with comprehensive schools catering to all abilities. Despite Conservative Party resistance, comprehensive schools now enroll about 90% of secondary-level state school children. (26)

Cairncross cited three factors that led the Conservative Party to enact the 1988 Education Reform Bill. First, was Britain's economic need for an educated and disciplined workforce. Second, winning the battle with teacher unions over pay increases, the Conservative government forced a clearer definition of teachers' duties. Third, firmly in power for a third term, the Conservatives took on obstructionist Labor Party controlled local authorities. Because schools are the local authorities' biggest expense and local property taxes are inadequate, the Conservative government decided to take advantage of its purse strings. (27)

Cairncross further explains central government's step-by-step move toward the Education Reform Bill. A Youth Training Scheme (YTS) for jobless 16 and 17-year-old school leavers was begun in 1983. By 1984, 29% of 16-year-old boys were in school, while 28% of 16-year-old boys were enrolled in YTS. In 1986 the government increased parent power on school boards and also proposed the City Technology Colleges. Remaining features were soon added: a national curriculum, parental option to transfer schools from local to state control, and national assessment of pupil progress. (28)

Cairncross notes these oft-repeated concerns about the reform bill:

1. social and racial division as the bright go to better schools and the less able to poorer schools;
2. the uncertain fate of children left behind in poor schools;
3. the likely increase in segregated rich-poor, black-white schools;
4. new management and budgetary concerns for head teachers and teachers in schools that leave local control;
5. differences between teachers in possibly higher paying successful schools and those in lower paying poorer schools;

6. City Technology Colleges' difficulties in finding time for science specialties in a loaded curriculum and locating trained science teachers; and
7. fairness in national assessment of various subjects.

England's Education Reform Act is an unprecedented redirection of education. Until the new reforms are implemented, upheavals seem inevitable. If successful, the rewards will be substantial. (29)

England's private schools have historically served upper and middle classes while charity schools taught the 3Rs to working class children. A small government grant in 1833 to church schools encouraged them to admit free some brighter working class children to elementary schools. Enrollments and costs grew. In 1862 a "payment by results" code tied grants to student achievement on tests. Critics say that the 1988 Education Reform Act is a throwback to the 1862 payment by results. Education acts in 1870 opened the way for free elementary schools for all; in 1902 for free secondary schools; and in 1944 for a unified but still selective state school system. England's late start and halting progress in tax-supported schools is attributed to still lingering class divisions. (30) A "Revolution with Reluctance" is Education Professor Edmund J. King's apt phrase describing English education. (31)

Many past USA school reforms have been cyclical, transmuted in other directions, or continued by smaller interest groups, or short lived. Recall the shift from colonial religious education emphasis to practical-industrial-commercial education as in Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia Academy (1751): English to offset Latin; surveying and math, navigation, mechanic arts, and later engineering, handwriting, and accounting--all to meet economic needs.

Recall English Quaker Joseph Lancaster's monitorial schools in the U.S.--older students as monitors who, coached by a master teacher, drilled 100 or more poor children all at once in the 3 Rs. These were cheap and

popular (1805-40s), and prompted New York Free School Society President DeWitt Clinton to say, "I consider [Lancaster's] system as creating a new era in education, and as a blessing sent down from heaven to redeem the poor."

Recall the shift to publicly supported schools by Horace Mann and others after they convinced state legislators, farmers, businessmen, and others that tax-supported free public schools would produce better citizens, workers, and taxpayers for the new industrial age.

Recall the NEA Committee of 10 report in 1893--dominated by Harvard President Charles W. Eliot and other higher education interests. In a "throwback" reform attempt, they recommended a narrowly academic college preparatory curriculum for all, college bound or not. The U.S. was changing: industrialization, immigration, urbanization, child and adolescent psychology studies, the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act for vocational education and home economics, rapid high school growth, and the testing and efficiency movements--all led to the 1918 NEA Commission's report, Seven Cardinal Principles. The schools' broadened seven purposes were to advance health, command of fundamental processes (3Rs), worthy home membership, vocational education, citizenship, worthy leisure time, and ethical character.

Recall how the 1930s Great Depression helped John Dewey's child-centered progressive education influence schooling. World War II and Sputnik (1957) reinstated subject-centered selective education. Nineteen sixties Black and youth protests led to President Johnson's Great Society programs and neoprogressive open education. Skeptics can ask what happened to other popular reforms: teachers' centers, career education, team teaching, home teaching, and others. In troubled times school reforms burst forth. If they cannot solve problems, they die out. Are 1980s school reforms different?

Current school reform seems different because of America's weakened economy and loss of moral leadership since World War II. Recall--

1. the dramatic rise in energy costs after the 1973 OPEC oil boycott and the shock of gas lines;
2. stagflation after high Vietnam War costs;
3. U.S trade deficit because of better selling West German and Japanese electronics and cars, better and cheaper Korean steel, lower Mexican and other third-world country assembly labor costs;
4. lowered SAT and other national test scores as more minorities and poor whites took these tests;
5. international test comparisons showing Japanese and Western European students scoring higher in math, science, other subjects;
6. states and local districts forced to cover large 1981-87 Reagan administration federal aid cutbacks;
7. shift from World War II baby boom to the graying of America, with fewer workers paying taxes to support older and younger Americans.

In this context, A Nation at Risk (1983) dramatically set the tone for present school reform. To paraphrase A Nation at Risk:

> Our schools are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future. If an enemy had imposed on usthe mediocre educational performance that exists, we would see it as an act of war. Unthinkingly, we imposed mediocrity on ourselves by dismantling post-Sputnik basic education gains, thus weakening our schools, disarming ourselves, mortgaging our future, and causing job losses at home, foreign trade imabalance, and military weakness in the face of U.S.S.R. strength. (32)

Grave school faults were cited:

> 13% of all 17-year-olds and 40% of minority youths, plus 23 million adults, are functionally illiterate; SAT scores dropped, 1963-80, with consistent declines in English, math, and science; and complaints are made about costly remedial programs in colleges, industry, and the military. The reforms needed are to reinstate basic education, lengthen the school day and year, hold educators and officials accountable for all students' mastering four years of high school English, three years each of math, science, and social studies, one-half year of computer science, and, for the college bound, two years of a foreign language. (33)

Subsequent critical reports echoed, amplified, or documented A Nation at Risk charges. Today's school reform pressures come, not from educators or parents or the public, but from governors and legislators wanting industry and jobs in their states, and from academic elites such as Allan Bloom and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and before them from Great Books advocate Robert M. Hutchins and the still active Mortimer Adler.

A pessimistic view of 1980s school reform was given by educator-critic Joel Spring: education is a political football made to serve special economic interests. Public schools will increasingly separate students according to labor market needs. Teachers will be more controlled, class divisions will widen, and life chances will decline for minorities and the poor. (34)

An optimistic view is that the economic motive is critical and must be served, but that states and educational organizations, backed by the public, are concerned and are making progress toward equity. Ultimately, voters decide by whom they elect and how strongly they declare their resolve, that school reform must advance both the economy and equality of opportunity for all.

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